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Learn How Hollywood Helped Reform Mental Health With 'Snake Pit' At April 2 Lecture

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UNH Media Relations

March 26, 2009

DURHAM, N.H. - In 1948, the movie "The Snake Pit" helped transform the public view of mental illness and reform treatment of the mentally ill. On Thursday, April 2, 2009, Ben Harris, professor of psychology, will discuss the impact of this groundbreaking motion picture in his lecture "Reforming Mental Health via Hollywood: 'The Snake Pit' and Its Audiences."

Harris' lecture begins at 3:40 p.m. in Conant Hall 101. It is free and open to the public. The children and grandchildren of Millen Brand, one of the screen writers, are expected to attend the lecture.

Based on an autobiographical novel by the same name, "The Snake Pit" told of a woman's nervous breakdown and recovery at an understaffed, overcrowded hospital in upstate New York. Harris' talk starts with the life of novelist Mary Jane Ward and follows her story into print and then onto the screen. There, it helped create major reforms in the treatment of the mentally ill.

"Although it was criticized in the 1970s for being anti-feminist, Freudian propaganda, the authors of the film's screenplay were anti-fascists who hoped for a better, post-WWII society," Harris says.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 11,800 undergraduate and 2,400 graduate students.

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